

Strategic Vision

The State of California and our local jurisdiction, community based organization, and nonprofit agency partners will make every effort to transition Hurricane Katrina and Rita evacuees currently housed in hotels and motels through the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)/Corporate Lodging Consultants (CLC) contract to more permanent housing. This effort will engage the full cooperation of FEMA, including consideration of requests for time extensions beyond the publicized cut-off date of January 7, 2006, consistent with the challenges imposed by California's already tight affordable housing environment.

Introduction

In October 2005, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) took over responsibility for the direct payment of hotel rooms for Hurricane Katrina and Hurricane Rita evacuees that had been previously covered by the American Red Cross, through a contract with Corporate Lodging Consultants (CLC). In early November, FEMA announced that all evacuees housed under this program would need to find alternative housing arrangements by December 1, 2005. On November 23, 2005, FEMA extended this deadline to December 15, 2005. At the same time FEMA notified ten states where large numbers of FEMA/CLC contract evacuees were being housed, including California, that the deadline could be extended until January 7, 2006 if the state submitted an acceptable transitional housing plan to their FEMA Region Director by December 9, 2005. This document represents that plan.

Background

On September 2, 2005, shortly after the full long-term population dislocation impact of Hurricane Katrina was realized, the Federal government reached out to State governments for their assessments of the number of evacuees they could support. When California queried its local jurisdictions and asked them to assess their capabilities, the question was couched in the terms of the number that each jurisdiction could house and otherwise support on a long term basis (i.e., not just in a congregate care shelter). At that time California indicated it could take 1000 evacuees and house them on a long-term basis. As of December 2, 2005, FEMA reports show that 17,305 evacuees have teleregistered with FEMA indicating that their current residence is in California. None of them were transported officially by FEMA through the well-publicized "evacuee airlifts" from shelters in Louisiana, Mississippi, and Texas. The evacuees in California voluntarily migrated by their own means or with the help of relatives, friends, volunteers, or faith-based sponsors. According to local agencies providing assistance to the evacuees, the migration to California is an on-going process as hurricane victims pursue short term relocation or opt to remain in California permanently. Although it varies somewhat by location, anecdotal information provided by the ARC indicates that as many as one-half of the evacuees have indicated a desire to remain in California until the situation in their home communities (mainly in Louisiana) have stabilized.

On December 1, 2005, FEMA provided the Governor's Office of Emergency Services (OES) with a list of hotels covered under the FEMA/CLC contract. The information contained in

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this list is the subject of the proposed January 7, 2006 deadline for evacuees to transition to a more permanent form of housing. According to that list (dated November 30, 2005), FEMA's count of contracted rooms in California was 2066 rooms in 113 separate hotels in 16 counties (see Table 1 for summary by county). FEMA is currently sending their Community Relations (CR) staff out to make contact with management from each hotel to verify the actual numbers of CLC contract rooms that remain occupied. CR reports indicate that many of the hotels had fewer rooms inhabited by evacuees than FEMA billing records indicated. The CR teams have not yet completed their survey and are not able to give the State a revised count. The "fluidity" of this information is one of the challenges faced by the State and our local agency partners in placing these evacuees into alternative housing situations.

On September 13, 2005, the President declared a State Emergency (EM-3248) for California, recognizing the "emergency protective measures" that the state was and would be undertaking to support Hurricane Katrina evacuees. After the number of evacuees and their long term needs were realized, federal support under Section 403 of the Stafford Act evolved into covering the costs of resource fairs and local assistance centers to provide support to evacuees. In addition, local agencies were permitted, under this program, to lease apartments or houses for evacuees that were in shelters or interim housing such as hotels and receive full FEMA reimbursement until March 1, 2006. After this date, we are assuming that FEMA anticipates that eligible households will have transitioned to long-term temporary housing as defined by the Individual Assistance Program outlined in Section 408 of the Stafford Act or that these eligible households will have received their insurance settlements or otherwise moved on toward rebuilding their lives. Unfortunately, it is almost certain that some of the households currently in hotels will be determined ineligible for any further Hurricane Katrina or Rita assistance.

California's Response

State

California, through State agencies and, most critically, our local, community based, and voluntary agency partners, have been attempting to assist Hurricane Katrina and Rita evacuees while they reside in California. Many local, community, voluntary, and state agencies have come together at resource fairs and local assistance centers to provide an efficient process for evacuees to access services in their California host community. Actions taken by California state agencies and departments to assist Katrina/Rita evacuees, including those that are currently residing in FEMA/CLC contract hotels, are outlined in Attachment 1 to this Plan. These services have been and are being provided through participation in evacuee resource fairs/local assistance centers, direct support to their counterpart local agencies or departments, and referrals by local agencies, community and faith based organizations, and voluntary agencies.

Local

The majority of work that is being done to assist Hurricane Katrina/Rita evacuees is being done by local agencies, community based organizations, and private nonprofit agencies at the City and County level. The following are examples of the ongoing efforts by these entities to

support the evacuees, particularly those in the FEMA/CLC program, and assist them in their transition to life in California:

- The Los Angeles Housing Authority has adopted a modification to the City's Rent Stabilization Ordinance to allow landlords to temporarily charge reduced rents to eligible persons displaced by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. City and county staff and voluntary agencies are reaching out to both landlords and eligible evacuees to implement this special program.
- Los Angeles City and County have established a joint working group to coordinate efforts by City/County agencies and voluntary and community based organizations to reach out to all Hurricane evacuees that have relocated to the County. These efforts include housing services, welfare, mental health services, and employment services. At present they are redoubling their efforts to reach out specifically to those in the FEMA/CLC program.
- In Sacramento County, the Red Cross established a Service Center. All those currently in hotels have been through that Center, which has included referrals to social welfare and labor and unemployment programs. The County Mental Health Agency has made counseling available.
- San Joaquin County is continuing to do individual casework with evacuees in hotels to assist them in completing the rental/lease process, including assisting with deposits, facilitating utility hook-ups, coordinating with community and voluntary organizations to obtain furnishings, and scheduling pre-occupancy inspections.
- In Alameda County, the City of Oakland, and the City of Berkeley, local housing authorities, community based organizations (CBO), and faith based organizations have formed a working group to address the housing transition deadline. They propose to work through a lead CBO, which has housing and real estate experience, to coordinate the transition. They envision a more case-centered program as opposed to a simple referral program, as many of the evacuees are unfamiliar with the Alameda County area and may need assistance in negotiating with landlords. This program will also include referrals to other social and support services. As with other communities that are providing these kinds of services, they are being hampered by the low vacancy rates for rental, and particularly affordable, housing.
- San Diego County and its cities that are housing evacuees in hotels are working to provide transitional housing through Catholic Charities, which has assumed the lead for an ad hoc working group, which includes the American Red Cross, several other faith-based organizations, and city and county agencies. A Katrina Unmet Needs Committee has also been established and the County is taking a multi-agency approach to serving these clients..

Barriers and Constraints

- For most of the California counties with large concentrations of evacuees, including those presently in hotels, the Fair Market Rent (FMR) is higher than the initial IHP allotment (see Table 1). In addition, the HUD FMR used by FEMA to determine how much a particular household should be allotted for temporary housing still falls well below "normal" housing rates for many areas of California.

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- California Housing and Community Development (HCD) indicates that there are fewer overall vacancies in affordable housing units in the State of California than reported evacuees. Overall, vacancy rates in the areas with the largest concentrations of evacuees currently residing in hotels are low, in some cases less than four percent.
- Most cities where the evacuees have located and are being housed in the FEMA/CLC have waiting lists for affordable housing units that predate the influx of hurricane evacuees. While they want to help the evacuees, it is, in many cases, politically difficult to move them to the front of the line, ahead of waiting local families.
- Obtaining specific information about evacuees (who they are, where they are, their eligibility, etc.), due to Privacy Act constraints and the inability for the State to share information with the local entities working at the ground level, has caused problems in identifying individual cases. It has also hampered the cross-referencing of FEMA and ARC lists of evacuees.
- December and January can be problematic months for rentals in communities that have their housing markets influenced by local colleges, as these are the start of new semesters or quarters. It can also be difficult for communities that are impacted by end-of-harvest transitions.
- Coordination with individual evacuee households is very staff intensive for all local, state, and community based emergency and social service agencies involved. No federal funding is available to supplement this unbudgeted workload. As the State has no funding for outreach, FEMA CR teams will need to continue to contact evacuees in the hotels and share this information with the state and local agencies.
- Many individuals do not have the wherewithal to make a decision for long-term housing as they are still uncertain of their individual relocation plans (i.e. if or when they will return to their pre-hurricane community). Some evacuees still do not know their long-range FEMA and/or SBA eligibility. Many evacuees will not be able to “take-over” a Section 403 lease and transition under Section 408. Some evacuees have already spent their initial housing grants on items (deposits, food, etc.) which could prevent them from being recertified by FEMA for additional assistance.
- Voluntary agencies need full-time coordination as they are proving to be a key component in assisting evacuees with unmet needs and those who are ineligible for FEMA funding (which could include a sizable percentage of those still remaining in the FEMA/CLC program). The State of California does not have the budget or staffing resources to assist with this full-time coordination. The FEMA Region IX Voluntary Agency Liaison has, until very recently, been unavailable for voluntary agency coordination due to deployment to the Gulf States.

Assumptions

- The Section 403 program funds and other Katrina declaration program funds cannot be used for housing security and utility deposits, furniture, or other essentials for transitioning evacuees unless otherwise referenced in the Code of Federal Regulations (Section 206.101(h)(i)). This unmet need is cited by most jurisdictions as a problem.
- The FEMA IHP is not providing security or utility deposit funding that would help get evacuees housed in longer-term housing. Voluntary agencies usually tapped for this are already beyond capacity to assist in caseloads of this magnitude. In addition,

many evacuees will not be able to pass credit checks to get into longer-term housing because of credit history or loss of job(s) due to the disaster(s).

- Programs that have been available, such as the FEMA direct-funded out-of-state transportation and the limit on signing Section 403 leases by December 15, are ending prior to the extended deadline for getting evacuees out of hotels. The absence of these programs will have a huge impact on transition costs. Even if the deadline for signing leases under the Section 403 program is extended until January 7, 2006, it will be difficult to find property owners that are willing to enter into a two month lease.
- FEMA Helpline appears to be automatically advising evacuees who call them with housing questions to contact the State for assistance. However, “the State” is not privy to specific case information (e.g., eligibility status), which is critical to facilitating the optimal housing solution for that household. The Helpline should advise the evacuees of their current status with respect to the FEMA IHP and provide information such as the FEMA Housing Locator line for housing resources versus immediately sending the caller to the State.

Timeline

As indicated previously, the majority of jurisdictions in which the FEMA/CLC program hotels are located, are facing a number of constraints that may inhibit their ability to place all of those remaining in the FEMA/CLC hotels into more permanent housing by the January 7, 2006 deadline. Many have requested extensions of the January 7, 2006 hotel program deadline, the March 1, 2006 end date for Section 403 leases, or both, in order to implement a functional and meaningful alternative for the evacuees. If the deadline for extending the FEMA funded hotel program is not viable, some have inquired as to the potential option of using Section 403 funds to extend these hotel leases on a case-by-case basis as household-specific solutions are implemented. Unfortunately, we understand from the November 23, 2005 Disaster Specific Guidance document that this is not currently eligible.

Between now and January 7, 2006, we propose the following timeline to keep the FEMA Region IX office apprised of the State’s progress in meeting the deadline (the timeline will be revised if the requested assistance is granted):

- December 5, 2005 -- Distribute list of FEMA/CLC contract hotels to Operational Areas via OES Region offices. Updated lists will be distributed within 1 business day of receipt in the same manner if they become available from FEMA.
- December 9, 2005 – This plan with request for extension submitted to FEMA Region IX.
- December 15, 2005 – Approval of this plan by FEMA.
- December 20, 2005 – Conduct conference call with local jurisdictions impacted by this plan to assess status and identify problems/concerns.
- December 21, 2005 – Weekly report due to FEMA Region IX, summarizing local progress and concerns raised in the conference call.
- December 27, 2005 – Conduct conference call with local jurisdictions impacted by this plan to assess status and identify problems/concerns.

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- December 28, 2005 – Weekly report due to FEMA Region IX, summarizing local progress and concerns raised in the conference call.
- January 2, 2006 – Conduct conference call with local jurisdictions impacted by this plan to assess status and identify problems/concerns.
- January 3, 2006 – Weekly report due to FEMA Region IX, summarizing local progress and concerns raised in the conference call.
- January 9, 2006 – Final conference call to assess status and discuss transition of remaining caseload and ongoing issues to voluntary organizations, community based organizations, and faith based organizations.

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Table 1 – Summary of Information on FEMA/CLC Hotel Housing

County	Number of Hotels (as of 11/30)	Number of Rooms (as of 11/30)	Fair Market Rent (2 bdrm apt)
Alameda	13	341	\$1342
Contra Costa	8	97	\$1342
San Francisco	6	180	\$1539
San Mateo	1	5	\$1539
Santa Clara	2	21	\$1313
Sonoma	2	23	\$1154
Fresno	2	22	\$616
Sacramento	6	191	\$971
San Joaquin	3	74	\$734
Yolo	1	7	\$851
Los Angeles	32	565	\$1124
Orange	7	105	\$1317
Riverside	4	56	\$752
San Bernardino	7	85	\$752
San Diego	17	271	\$1183
Ventura	2	23	\$1382
TOTAL	113	2066	

Source of data: Hotel locations and Number of hotels and rooms from FEMA list dated November 30, 2005. Fair Market Rents from HUD website for 2005.

Attachment 1: Actions Taken by State Agencies to Support Katrina/Rita Evacuees

The following is a list of actions that have been taken by State agencies to assist Katrina/Rita evacuees, including those that are currently residing in FEMA/CLC contract hotels. These services have been and are being provided through participation in evacuee resource fairs/local assistance centers:

Employment Development Department

- Assisting with registration and processing of evacuees' Disaster Unemployment Assistance claims
- Assisting with registration and processing of evacuees Unemployment Insurance claims
- Providing job training and job placement opportunities

Department of Social Services

- Implementing, as needed, the emergency food assistance program
- Implementing the disaster food stamp program
- Providing support through ongoing Social Service public assistance programs at the county level

Department of Mental Health

- Coordinating Mental Health services as well as Critical Incident Stress Debriefings through local county mental health offices (The FEMA-funded Immediate Services Program ended November 9, 2005)

Department of Motor Vehicles

- Assisting with provision of identification cards and licensing

Department of Housing and Community and Development

- Assisting with the identification of long-term evacuee housing opportunities

Department of Education

- Identifying, assisting with, and providing for the educational needs of adult and youth evacuees

Governor's Office of Emergency Services

- Responding to numerous inquiries from evacuees and local government/voluntary agencies attempting to assist evacuees through a special telephone inquiry line managed by OES Individual Assistance
- Serving as liaison with FEMA to coordinate the provisions of federal assistance for evacuees located in California
- Coordinating state agency participation in FEMA Information Days, Local Assistance Centers, or Resource Information Fairs, as requested
- Providing evacuee assistance information to cities and counties via the OES Administrative Regional Offices (Southern, Coastal, and Inland)
- Keeping appropriate state agencies apprised of updates regarding assistance for evacuees

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- Assisting with the dissemination of public information
- Serving as the grantee for FEMA funds to reimburse local and state agencies for the cost of interim evacuee assistance/housing support (under Section 403 of the Stafford Act)
- Sharing hotel information where evacuees are located with impacted local governments
- Advising local governments in hiring case managers to assist evacuees in locating housing and other associated needs
- Handling and tracking evacuee inquiries, providing information and referring them to FEMA to teleregister if they have not already done so
- Using the OES web page to provide links to information for:
 1. Hurricane victims currently living in California -- There is specific information on animal services, counseling, employment/unemployment, housing, legal assistance, local government services in California, locating missing family/friends, public benefits (food, medical, etc.), replacement of important documents, change of address, school enrollment in California, transportation and other services.
 2. Local governments or volunteer agencies assisting hurricane evacuees
 3. Volunteers or donations
 4. Registering to provide resources to hurricane declared states
- Developing a resource guide for evacuees – currently, OES has drafted a 32 page guide to assist callers with expanded information from the web site
- Providing Geographic Information System (GIS) mapping of data such as number and location of evacuees, American Red Cross caseloads, etc.